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To: Interested Parties

From: HIT Strategies – Roshni Nedungadi and Martina Smith, Pollsters

Low-propensity voters in Cleveland are ready to engage in order to improve their communities

Key findings

1 Low-propensity Cleveland voters are not apathetic, they just lack information. Over two-thirds of low-propensity* Clevelanders (69%) reported that they were at least somewhat likely to vote in September Cleveland primary election, and a large majority (89%) reported that they cared a great deal or cared a little bit about who is elected the next mayor of Cleveland. However, only a small percentage of Clevelanders (21%) were able to select their correct city council member from a drop-down menu, and fully 36 percent of respondents either thought Frank Jackson was still running for mayor or were not sure if he was.

“How can you be a council person and not visit a whole street, a whole neighborhood in your ward? I’ve seen that a lot and I can’t say that I’m surprised, but to really experience the depth. There are some, there are some, and I’m going to hit them too, honey. **But people don’t think that they are cared for. They don’t think that they matter. And that’s why there’s a low turnout.** People are registered, but they don’t vote.”

—Black woman

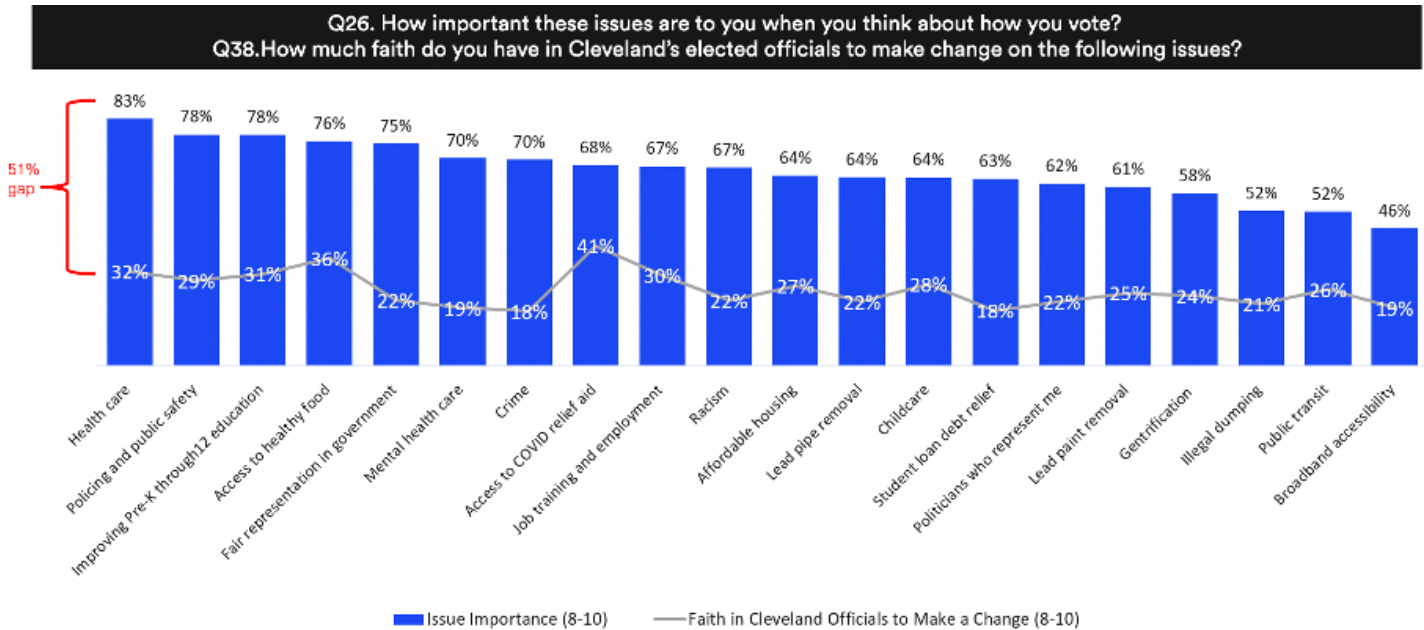
2 These voters are concerned about the state of their communities, and care about improving them, but don’t trust local elected officials to enact the change they wish to see.

“**But I feel like I haven’t seen any big changes in a long time.** As far as all Cleveland government, the city police, the correction officers in the county, all this stuff that’s going on down there. The clerk...as far as like...I don’t even know what they’re called, **but with the corruption and you know, different offices within the city and within the state and inappropriate funds being spent in places they’re not supposed to be and all this, you know, little stuff that people are getting caught up with in government positions. It’s like okay, we need to get some new folks in there.**”

—Latina woman

*Low-propensity voters were City of Cleveland registered voters who were either registered with no vote history or had voted in limited presidential or midterm elections but had no municipal election year vote history.

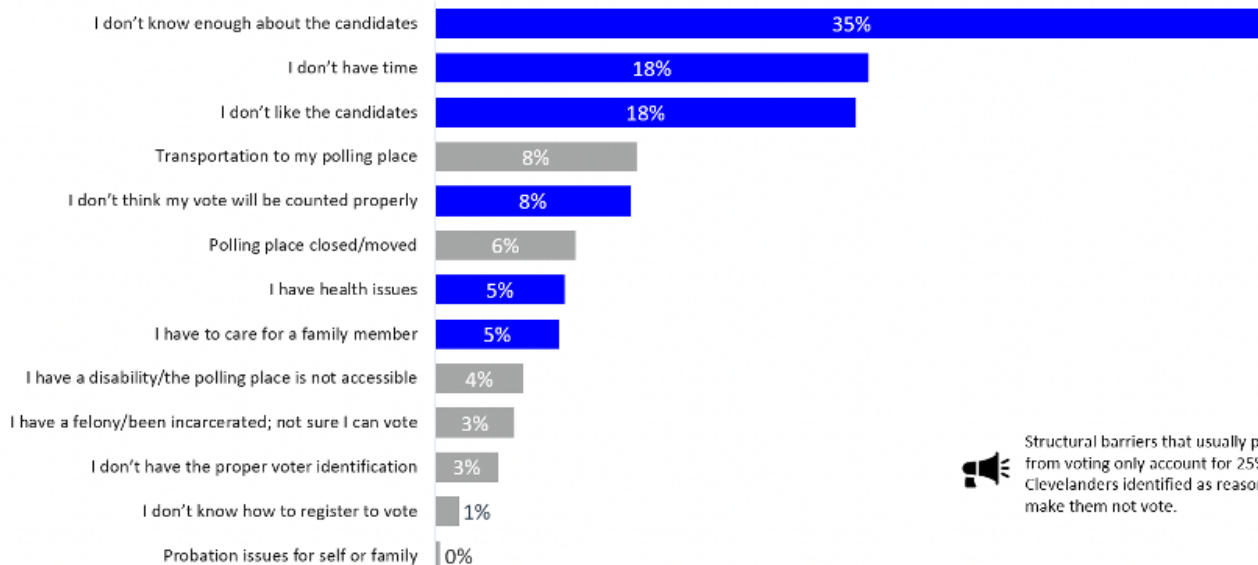
While overwhelming majorities of these low-propensity voters think that issues like health care (83%); policing and public safety (78%); and improving pre-K through 12 education (78%) are very important when they're thinking about voting, they don't trust local elected officials to do anything about these issues that are most important to them.



3 This lack of trust is underscored by current financial conditions. Low-propensity Cleveland voters are frustrated with the state of their community, and are experiencing hardship. Only 5 percent are very satisfied with the direction in which Cleveland is headed, with only 46 percent overall satisfied. Forty-one percent of those surveyed, and fully half of Black and Latinx low-propensity Clevelanders reported skipping a bill or paying it late in the last 3-months. Additionally, 27 percent of Black low-propensity Clevelanders (19% overall, 14% Latinx) reported not having enough money to buy food, and 30 percent (22% overall, 18% Latinx) were unable to pay their full rent or mortgage in the last 3 months.

4 Barriers to voting are largely informational. These low-propensity voters care about the issues and care about their community, they just lack the information needed to take the next steps. Structural barriers that usually prevent people from voting only accounted for a quarter of the responses when asked why they might not vote in any upcoming local elections. The top three reasons given – I don't know enough about the candidates, I don't have time, and I don't like the candidates can all be combatted with an informational campaign that explains when and how to vote and gives relevant information on all the candidates running for local office.

Q31. Please tell me the top 2 reasons that best describe why you might not vote in the upcoming local election.



Structural barriers that usually prevent people from voting only account for 25% of the factors Clevelanders identified as reasons that might make them not vote.

5 Emphasizing collective power and showcasing the ability to make real change are key elements to persuading low-propensity voters to get engaged and to vote. Low-propensity voters need to hear that their voices matter, and that taking action can lead to real, measurable change in their communities. Grounding communications with them in what is achievable, while also explaining concrete outcomes and how they would benefit their communities led to an increase in vote likelihood. Collective power is key here – these low propensity voters want to see their communities coming together to demand the change they so desperately want from their elected officials.

Cause it's like, maybe it does matter because I'm just one vote, but a lot of people are just one vote, 800 people as an individual or just one vote.
—Young white woman

Methodology

This memo outlines topline findings from the Cleveland city-wide survey and focus groups conducted by HIT Strategies on behalf of Policy Matters Ohio and Cleveland VOTES. This survey consisted of 600 low propensity voters and 100 unregistered voters in Cleveland. The survey was conducted via text-to-web and phone utilizing both landline and cellphone numbers. The survey fielded from August 13 -September 15, 2021, and the margin of error is +/- 4% for the base sample, and +/- 9.8% for the unregistered sample with a confidence level of 95%. The margin of error within subgroups is higher.

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